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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003538

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SUBJECT: THAILAND CELEBRATES ITS KING

REF: BANGKOK 003349 NOODLES WITH THAKSIN

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RALPH L. BOYCE. REASON 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary. The Thai people took time off from their political crisis on June 9 to celebrate the 60th year of King Bhumipol Adulyadej's reign. The multi-day gala offered dramatic and often times moving evidence of the nation's respect and adoration for its monarch. In his public audience on Friday, which attracted a crowd estimated at one million people, the King called for national unity in working to ensure prosperity for the nation. Caretaker-Prime Minister Thaksin played a prominent, if subdued role throughout the festivities, but there is no question who really rules in the hearts of the Thai people. End Summary.

A DIAMOND JUBILEE

12. (SBU) From June 9-13, Thailand celebrated the 60th year of King Bhumipol Adulyadej's reign. Twenty-five representatives of royal families from around the world joined with a who's who of Thai politics and high society in commemorating the occasion in a series of Buddhist ceremonies, a public address by the King, fireworks, a royal barge procession on the river, and finally, a gala dinner at the palace.

13. (SBU) While the Thai people's respect and reverence for the 78 year old monarch is often cited, the weekend's celebration was a rare occasion to see--and feel--the depths of this sentiment in person. In contrast to the tens of thousands who have rallied against and in support of the Thaksin government, the King's public address on Friday at throne hall inspired an estimated one million Thai to brave the mid-day sun to listen to their "father" speak. (Note, only the third such public address in the King's reign. End Note.) Much of the audience had camped out since the evening before.

14. (SBU) Bangkok's sidewalks and public transportation became a sea of yellow, as citizens donned the color of the King's birthday (a Monday, thus a yellow day.) The rush to conform even found expression on the local markets, where the price of yellow "we love the King" shirts skyrocketed. In response, the government announced that it would produce extra shipments of such clothing, to force down the price. Bangkok's normally snarled traffic reached new heights of obstruction, with motorcades and security details turning local roads into parking lots. While government offices and schools were closed, the malls and markets remained open; the sound of radio and television broadcasts of the gala filling the air.

15. (SBU) The local press focused exclusively on the celebration. Newspapers carried full-page sections on the King's life and works. Interviews with Thai of all ages and backgrounds conveyed the same joyous appreciation for the monarch, with individual stories of how royal assistance had improved their lives. All local television stations carried the same live feed of each event, which featured crowd shots of attendees alternately crying and smiling. Late night television shifted to cover the opening of the World Cup, but even this event was colored by the King's celebration: a newspaper cartoon explained that most Thai people were cheering for Brazil because the Brazilians wear yellow uniforms.

THE KING SPEAKS

16. (SBU) In his public remarks on Friday, the King thanked the assembled dignitaries and crowd for their congratulations and called upon the Thai people to show compassion, cooperate with each other, display integrity, and be reasonable. In a not-so-veiled reference to the ongoing political crisis, the King stated, "unity is the basis for all Thai to help preserve and bring prosperity to the country."

THE DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY PICNIC

17. (C) The event was also an opportunity for all 131 branches of the royal family to reunite, though the sheer size of the clan reportedly made protocol preparations a nightmare. The more immediate royal family was on full display as well, with the Crown Prince and Princesses greeting foreign royalty upon arrival at the airport and traveling to local temples to perform ceremonies in honor of the King. In a shot heavy with unintentional meaning on Friday, the television broadcast showed the unpopular Crown Prince reading a message of congratulations to the King, who was seated on the royal balcony above the Prince. Just visible behind the King, however, was the smiling face of Princess Sirindorn--the widely respected "intellectual heir" of the monarch--chatting with her sisters and trying to take a picture of the adoring crowd below. The physical distance between the King and his legal heir far below, and his beloved daughter just behind him, captured the internal family dynamic--and the future of the monarchy--quite nicely.  
DON'T FORGET THE PM  
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18. (C) Prime Minister Thaksin was front and center for much of the festivities: greeting foreign guests, and reading a congratulatory message for the King on behalf of the caretaker government. In an unfortunate bit of timing, the television camera covering the opening ceremony on Friday panned on the PM just as he was checking his watch. Aside from this minor gaffe--not mentioned in the newspapers, yet--the PM's personal perspective on the celebration remains unclear. As reported in ref, Thaksin recently told the Ambassador that his own popularity in the countryside is seen by the palace as threatening to the King's popular standing. After this weekend's massive, unprecedented display of public adoration for the monarch, however, one hopes that Thaksin has a firm enough grasp of reality to reconsider this idea.  
BOYCE